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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3067
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1364
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3410
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2796
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000458

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL HELWIG VISITS SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN

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Classified By: Amb. Tatiana Gfoeller, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Two staff members from the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the U.S. Helsinki Commission) and Poloff held meetings in Osh, Kyrgyzstan on May 5-6. Opposition party officials raised concerns about the state of democracy in Kyrgyzstan as the country prepares for the July 23 Presidential election. OSCE Field Office staff said that building a functioning democracy might take 100 years, and voiced the need for a Kyrgyz government body to champion good governance. OSCE staff also felt that Hizb ut-Tahrir was making inroads in southern Kyrgyzstan, particularly among women. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative reported on a growing problem of statelessness, with up to 19,000 Uzbek citizens now stateless residents of Kyrgyzstan due to legal quirks. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) U.S. Helsinki Commission staff members Janice Helwig and Shelly Han, accompanied by Poloff, traveled to Osh for meetings May 5-6. The staffdel's other meetings from their May 2-8 visit to Kyrgyzstan will be reported septel.

Meeting with the Political Opposition

¶3. (C) In Osh, opposition party officials argued that the upcoming Presidential election will be a turning point for democracy in Kyrgyzstan. Almost all of the democratic gains that Kyrgyzstan had made since independence have already been reversed, they said, and if President Bakiyev wins the July 23 vote, "democracy in Kyrgyzstan will be dead." Alimbai Kadyrov, the Social Democrat Party coordinator for Osh, noted that before Almazbek Atambayev's selection as the United People's Movement candidate, the government had pressured numerous opposition leaders, but now that pressure would be focused on undermining and discrediting Atambayev. Kadyrov was pessimistic about the opposition's chances of unseating Bakiyev. Sounding a more optimistic tone, Baktybek Kalmamatov, the Ata Meken Party Coordinator for Osh, vowed that the opposition would eventually triumph.

14. (C) OSCE Osh Field Office personnel explained their efforts as aiming for local sustainability within an environment of prevalent corruption and frequent turnover of potential partners within the government. One officer said that building a functioning democracy in Kyrgyzstan might take 100 years. Another officer said that the success of their efforts would depend on the development of a Kyrgyz government institution that could champion good governance, and he identified the Office of the Ombudsman as the only realistic option. The OSCE team doubted the effectiveness of the new Anti-Corruption Commission, describing its limited staffing and the questionable loyalties of its chair, a former police general. They said that on a visit to Osh, the chair had described his first project as rooting out educational sector corruption. The OSCE staff welcomed his efforts, but warned him that his idea for doing so -- forming secret committees of students to inform on corrupt teachers -- could have unintended consequences.

15. (C) The OSCE Human Dimensions Officer argued for increased international involvement to develop an accurate real property registry, noting that land demarcation issues underlie most border disputes with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. He also noted that the absence of a transparent public land registry is a key enabling factor for government corruption, allowing property to be transferred easily from the business owners who develop it to the powerful who covet it.

16. (C) The OSCE staff members raised several gender-related

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concerns during the meeting. Based on anecdotal evidence, they believed that Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) is making significant inroads in the South, particularly among women, because of the social services HT provides. While acknowledging there was little reliable data on bride-kidnapping, OSCE personnel claimed that anecdotal reports indicate the practice is widespread in rural areas, and the practice makes women vulnerable to trafficking, because families often shut their doors to kidnapped women who attempt to return home.

Lunch Meeting with Assistance Implementers -----

17. (SBU) At a lunch meeting with assistance program implementers, a UNHCR representative noted a problem with statelessness among Uzbek citizens who marry in Kyrgyzstan. Under Uzbek law, citizens who move to a different country, but do not register with an Uzbek consulate within five years, lose their citizenship. The Kyrgyz-Uzbek border cuts across villages and even houses, and because rural village residents are often not aware of the registration requirement, Uzbeks who marry into a household in Kyrgyzstan often lose their Uzbek citizenship without having taken steps to gain Kyrgyz citizenship. According to UNHCR, some 19,000 Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan have become stateless in this way.

18. (SBU) The German development agency GTZ described a project they are implementing, which focuses on developing exportable products for Kyrgyzstan. The GTZ representative said that they have tentatively identified three products -- beef, wool, and medicinal herbs -- which could be developed into sustainable exports. The NGO ACTED noted that in cooperation with the OSCE, they are completing a labor migration study to evaluate whether the world economic crisis is affecting remittances and unemployment levels in Kyrgyzstan.

Limited Success Combating Torture -----

19. (SBU) Human rights activists reported very limited

success in combating police abuse. They said that in two cases they had succeeded in bringing criminal charges against law enforcement agents who had tortured people. In one of those cases, the activists had succeeded in having police officers and a prosecutor dismissed with criminal fines, meaning that they could not again hold government jobs, but noted that the judge in the case was still under investigation. However, 48 other cases had not been successful. The activists explained that a successful prosecution required an airtight case, because solidarity among law enforcement officials would enable investigators to seize upon any weakness as an excuse to drop a case.

¶10. (U) Staffdel Helwig did not have a chance to clear this cable.
GFOELLER